



BWW Review: THERAPY FOR A VAMPIRE Is Homage To The Thirties

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Which do you prefer - 1930s comedies, or 1930s Universal horror films? If you find yourself torn, or your answer is *ABBOTT AND COSTELLO MEET THE WOLFMAN*, then David Ruehl's *THERAPY FOR A VAMPIRE* is your new best friend. A darkly hilarious romp through both vampire lore and Viennese psychoanalysis, beautifully cinematographed in sepia-tinted color as bouncy, tinny gramophone music plays over scenes, it dares ask whether life can become boring

after several hundred years of existence... and, more particularly, what the effects are of being married for five hundred years to the same other party. Filmed in German with English subtitles, it answers these questions with surprising wit and not as many nods to Freud as you might expect.

Karl Fischer plays Freud, who commits without full foreknowledge to analyzing Count Geza von Kozsnom (Tobias Moretti), who's grown tired of his wife over centuries and is obsessed with finding the reincarnation of his long-lost love, the beautiful Nadila. Viktor (Dominic Oley) is a young artist who sketches Freud's dreams and keeps painting his model, Lucy (Cornelia Ivancan) as the fussy blonde she isn't. Freud refers Viktor to the Count to paint his wife, the Countess Elsa (Jeanette Hain), who is desperate to see herself as she's unable to see her own reflection and fears she's aging badly.

It's a movie full of obsessions - the Count's longing for Nadila, and his OCD need to count (Count Von Count on *SESAME STREET* is a rank amateur next to him). The Countess' need to see her reflection in a mirror or a painting. Viktor's need to turn Lucy into a person she isn't, and the Count's efforts to do the same thing. Freud is obsessed with his dream research. The one thing Lucy wants is to be seen as herself - which is really the same thing that the Countess Elsa wants. The implied statements on women's needs in this film are stunning - Elsa's need to see herself, Lucy's need not to be seen as a reflection of what the men around her want, but to be seen as Lucy.

As for whether Elsa's aging badly after a few centuries, simply imagine an older Phryne Fisher from *MISS FISHER'S MURDER MYSTERIES*. This is no vampire hag, but a sophisticated, intelligent woman who's come to resent having been turned because she can no longer judge her appearance. She's possibly the



most sophisticated female vampire since *THE HUNGER*.

Great moments and sight gags abound, from floating above the therapy couch to Viktor's blindfolding himself to paint Elsa's face, to Elsa's mad rage at Lucy and Viktor. There are some lovely CGI moments as well - Elsa's crumbling, the Count's transformation to a bat. One of the most impressive parts of the vampiric transformations here, after decades of vampire special effects, though, is the use of cuts from human in one frame to the shadow of a wolf in the next. It's a touch that brings back the 1930s use of cuts before the use of effects, and puts a color film more firmly in the period in which it's set. Other than the use of color, there are times it really is possible to see this as a film from the 1930s, which is a delight for fans of films from the period.



As in the early days of the vampire film, there's no gore, but a deep lushness of surroundings and dress. Much of the humor is dry as dust, most of it dark as a moonless night, but it's entrancing: the Count, for example, won't bite anyone, but relies on his chauffeur to bottle blood for him; one mix is presented as "Sixty percent virgin, forty percent stripper". He drops by restaurants for raw steaks. Elsa catches flies for snacks (shades of Renfield in the original *DRACULA*). And then there are the

moments of Sigmund Freud, Vampire Researcher. Fischer's Freud is delightful, a more restrained portrayal than many actors have given, which makes his humor all the funnier.

While none of the other names allude to the Dracula mythos, it may be intentional that the central female here is named Lucy - Lucy Westrena is, in the original novel and the traditional films, the first named victim of Dracula's attacks. This Lucy, rather than falling under vampiric sway, is tough enough to fight off being merged into any man, human or vampire. The Count wants her to be the vampire Nadila, his old lover, but Lucy wants to be Lucy, and to be a vampire just so she can have the freedom of flying. She wants to be what she wants and who she wants, purely on her own terms. This is as close as we've gotten to feminism in a vampire film, and it's delicious.

Though it's really quite funny, there's no comparison to be brooked between this and *DRACULA: DEAD AND LOVING IT*, with *LOVE AT FIRST BITE*, or with *ONCE BITTEN*. Those played directly for laughs, while this is far more - forgive the pun - deadpan. The plot is straightforward vampire movie, and it's a piece of humor that takes itself, if not seriously, then at least not as played for yucks at every turn. It's remarkably sophisticated, and it's visually quite beautiful. In release on June 10, this Music Box Films production is a bijoux gem of a vampire flick. If it's your genre, don't miss it. You'll even learn to love subtitles.

Photo Credits: Music Box Pictures